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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BASESCU,S TRAVEL TO BAGHDAD AND KABUL:  
ROMANIA HOPES TO INCREASE ECONOMIC INVOLVEMENT

REF: BUCHAREST 1258

Classified By: CDA Mark Taplin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. President Traian Basescu,s August 9-10 trip to Baghdad and Kabul reaffirmed Romania,s strong military commitment and potential economic links with both countries. In Iraq, Basescu,s meetings with the President, PM, and cabinet members aimed to reestablish historic economic ties between Romania and Iraq. Basescu aims to increase economic benefits, normalize relations, and help provide long-term security through mutual economic development. In Kabul, Basescu met with President Karzai and promised to continue to provide expertise in civilian reconstruction and to train Afghan specialists in Romania. Karzai also accepted Basescu,s offer to host a visit in Romania. Meanwhile, Basescu exploited the trip to further relegate Defense Minister Atanasiu to the sidelines -- by demonstrably leaving him at home and announcing a deployment of U.S.-produced Humvees to replace unreliable Romanian-made vehicles. End Summary

¶2. (C) In an introductory meeting with Polchief August 11, MFA Director General Stelian Stoian provided a readout of Romanian President Basescu,s August 9-10 visit to Iraq and Afghanistan. Stoian, who accompanied Basescu on the trip, said that the August 9 Baghdad visit (reftel) was aimed at normalizing bilateral relations and strengthening ties beyond the military-to-military relationship. In the case of Iraq, especially, Stoian said that the President was mindful of business opportunities and the rekindling of pre-war commercial ties.

¶3. (C) Stoian noted that Romanian companies were the logical choice for reconstruction projects since they had been involved in building up many Iraqi sectors in the first place, including cement production, energy generation, and the agricultural sector. Stoian said Romanians would therefore be the best equipped to rehabilitate and modernize those industries. He said that Iraqi authorities agreed to a follow-up visit by Romanian experts, with the overall goal of moving from statements to concrete activity so that Romania would help provide more than just security in Iraq. He said the "normalization" of bilateral relations would also benefit the Iraqi side, since it would improve economic conditions and give more legitimacy to the Iraqi government, by underscoring that its foreign relations had more dimensions than just its bilateral ties with the United States.

Afghanistan

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¶4. (C) Basescu flew to Afghanistan directly from Iraq August 11 to review the second of Romania,s two largest deployments of soldiers. Basescu met Afghani President Hamid Karzai and other Afghani officials, held talks with the commanders of

the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Operation "Enduring Freedom" (OEF), and visited Romanian troops deployed in Kandahar, Kabul, and Qalat. Stoian said Basescu had wanted to see the troops in Qalat especially as they had just redeployed to what he termed a "more risky, active region" where they had seen fifteen attacks in their first ten days.

15. (C) During his meeting with president Karzai, Basescu praised Afghanistan's democratic development and pledged Romania's continued support for the consolidation of Afghani democratic institutions. Basescu promised Romania would continue to provide expertise in the field of civilian reconstruction and offered to train Afghani specialists in Romania. Stoian said, however, there was no concrete program agreed upon. Stoian said Karzai accepted Basescu's offer to visit Romania. The two presidents also discussed ways to enhance economic relations between the two countries. Stoian said they were impressed with the Afghani cabinet ministers and expected to increase contact with them during visits to Bucharest of the Economic and Defense Ministers. He said that Romania was invited to take part in projects related to the building of cement factories, electrical power plants, and irrigation systems and in the rehabilitation of roads and bridges. Basescu also invited an Afghani military delegation to come to Bucharest to explore how Romania could support the equipping of the Afghani Army. Stoian said there would be movement in the coming month on establishing long-term military cooperation between the two countries.

16. (C) Stoian reported the Romanian President had reaffirmed in a meeting with the commanders of the ISAF and OEF Romania's determination to fulfill its commitments towards its allies and to continue to contribute to the efforts of

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the international community to re-establish the security and the stability of Afghanistan. According to Stoian, Basescu also said that Romania would consider a NATO request to increase the number of its troops stationed in Afghanistan. (Note: Local UK Embassy contacts have told us that the request was for an additional company-sized unit, along with reserves. End note.)

17. (C) The local press continued to focus on Basescu's remarks on the equipment of Romanian troops after recent declarations of Defense Minister Teodor Atanasiu that Romania could no longer properly fulfill its missions abroad due to old and unreliable equipment. Basescu was driven from the Kandahar airport to the military bases in a U.S. military Humvee vehicle. He told journalists accompanying him that Humvees would replace the Romanian military's old vehicles. Basescu said this was an agreement he had made with U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld during his recent U.S.

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visit. Basescu noted that his intervention brought the American vehicles "into the field" for the troops, immediate use.

18. (C) Comment: President Basescu's trip to Iraq and Afghanistan was likely designed to remind Romanians -- as well as the President's political antagonists -- of his role as commander-in-chief and principal architect of Romania's foreign and security policies. This was particularly useful in the wake of recent calls by his Prime and Defense Ministers for a Romanian troop withdrawal from Iraq. Basescu's efforts to develop business opportunities for Romanian firms, are designed mainly to counter some critics who have charged that Romanian military deployments were doing little good for Romania's economy. His ability to broker deals or convince more business ties, however, are limited by both Romanian perceptions of the dangers of working in Iraq as well as the lack of direct leverage that the President has over GOR economic policy. End comment

**¶9. (U)** Amembassy Bucharest's reporting telegrams are available on the Bucharest SIPRNET Website:  
[www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/bucharest](http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/bucharest).

Taplin